

Episode 23 (Chapter 5 – Audiobook 3) 1830-1861

Hello and welcome to another chapter of the Hidden History of Texas.

We've made it to 1835 and things are about to get much more dangerous. In this chapter, I will talk about two significant occurrences that took place. The Battle of Gonzales and, the Siege of Bexar (aka San Antonio).

Domingo de Ugartechea , who was the Mexican military commander in Texas, received word that the American colonists of Gonzales refused to surrender a small cannon that had been given that settlement in 1831 as a defense against the Indians, he sent a force of about 100 dragoons to retrieve it. He realized that, given the tensions between the Texans and Antonio López de Santa Anna 's Centralist government, the slightest provocation might ignite hostilities.

He therefore instructed his men to avoid open conflict if possible. The company rode out of San Antonio de Béxar on September 27, 1835. On September 29th, the company lead by Francisco de Castañeda reached

the Guadalupe River opposite Gonzales where they found their path blocked by high water and eighteen militiamen (later called the Old Eighteen).

The militiamen told Castañeda that the Mexican dragoons would have to wait on the west side of the river until the alcalde Andrew Ponton returned. Since he was unable to proceed, Castañeda pitched camp 300 yards from the ford. As he awaited word from the absent alcalde, the men of Gonzales summoned reinforcements from several of the surrounding settlements.

Later, a Coshatta Indian entered the Mexican camp and informed Castañeda that the number of Texan volunteers now numbered at least 140 and more were expected. Knowing he could not forge the guarded crossing, Castañeda abandoned his campsite and marched his troops in search of another place not so well defended, where he could "cross without any embarrassment"

On the night of October 1 the Texans crossed to the west bank of the Guadalupe and marched upriver toward Castañeda's new camp. On the

morning of October 2 they attacked the Mexicans, and Castañeda ordered his men to fall back to a low rise behind their camp. During a lull in the fighting Castañeda arranged a parley with Texan commander John Henry Moore. Castañeda inquired why he and his men had been attacked without provocation, and Moore replied that the Texans were fighting to keep their cannon and to uphold the Constitution of 1824. Castañeda then assured Moore that he was himself a Federalist and personally opposed to the policies of Santa Anna. He added that he had no wish to fight colonists; he only had orders to reclaim the cannon. Moore then invited Castañeda to join the Texans in their fight for the federal Constitution of 1824. Castaneda said that since he was a soldier he had to follow orders, even if he didn't agree with the politics. Fighting resumed, and Castaneda, found himself outnumbered and outgunned, so he ordered a withdrawal toward Bexar. In his report he stated that "since the orders from your Lordship were for me to withdraw without compromising the honor of Mexican arms, I did so." Despite his efforts to avoid war, and the battle of Gonzales was really

only a brief skirmish it marked a clear break between the American colonists and the Mexican government.

While this “battle” was really not a battle, there was one that was about to begin. Right after the battle of Gonzales took place, a little West of Gonzales the first major campaign of the Texas Revolution started. From October until early December 1835 an army of Texan volunteers laid siege to a Mexican army in San Antonio de Béxar. The Texan army in Gonzales had grown to about 300 men and they began to move on October 12 toward San Antonio, where Gen. Martín Perfecto de Cos recently had concentrated Mexican forces numbering 650 men. Cos fortified the town plazas west of the San Antonio River and the Alamo, a former mission east of the stream.

By Mid-October the Texan army had grown to about 400 men and it reached Salado Creek east of San Antonio in mid-October. Notables such as James Bowie and Juan N. Seguín, who brought with him a company of Mexican Texans had joined the army. Bowie and James W. Fannin, Jr., led an advance to the missions below San Antonio in late

October, while Cos brought in 100 reinforcement men. On October 25 the Texans debated among themselves over strategy. Sam Houston, who had come from the Consultation government, urged delay for training and for cannons to bombard the fortifications. However, Austin and others won support to continue efforts at capturing San Antonio. On October 27, from a location near the mission, San Francisco de la Espada Austin sent Bowie and Fannin forward to Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña Mission with ninety men to locate a spot closer to the town where the army could take up positions. There on the foggy morning of the twenty-eighth Cos sent Col. Domingo de Ugartechea with 275 men to attack the advance force. The Texans drove off the assault from a position along the bank of the San Antonio River, inflicting over fifty casualties and capturing one cannon. Austin arrived after the battle and urged an attack on San Antonio but found little support among his officers. The two groups settled into position and the Texan army grew to about 600 after Thomas Rusk arrived with reinforcements.

As the time went by, Texas and Mexican cavalry skirmished from time to time and the Texans scouted to capture Mexican supplies and to warn of any reinforcements for Cos.

On November 8, a contingent lead by William Barret Travis captured 300 Mexican mules and horses grazing beyond the Medina River. On the 12th Ugartechea left San Antonio with a small cavalry force and directed reinforcements from below the Rio Grande towards San Antonio. Austin sent cavalry to intercept him, but the Mexican troops evaded them. Both armies suffered morale problems as a result of colder weather and limited supplies.

In Mid-November three companies with over a hundred men arrived from the United States and Austin once again wanted to attack. Other officers expressed doubts, however, and it was called off. Austin then left to assume diplomatic duties in the United States. The Texas troops selected Edward Burleson as their new leader.

In early December with winter approaching and due to limited supplies Burleson considered withdrawing to Goliad; however, upon receiving

information about Mexican defenses led to new attack plans. But fears that the Mexican army had learned of the assault brought a near breakup of the Texan army. When a Mexican officer surrendered with news of declining Mexican morale, Benjamin R. Milam and William Gordon Cooke gathered more than 300 volunteers to attack the town, while Burleson and another 400 men scouted, protected the camp and supplies, and forced Cos to keep his 570 men divided between the town and the Alamo.

Just before dawn on December 5, James C. Neill distracted the Mexican forces with artillery fire on the Alamo, while Milam and Francis W. Johnson simultaneously led two divisions in a surprise attack. The attack seized the Veramendi and Garza houses north of the plaza in San Antonio. Resistance from Mexican forces kept the Texans from advancing farther during the day and silenced one of their cannons. That night and the next day the Texans destroyed some buildings close to them and dug trenches to connect the houses they occupied. On the seventh the Texans captured another nearby house, but Milam died

from a sharpshooter's bullet. Johnson then directed another night attack that seized the Navarro house. On December 8 Ugartechea returned with over 600 reinforcements, but only 170 were experienced soldiers. Untrained conscripts formed the other 450 men, who brought with them few supplies. Burleson sent 100 men into town to join the Texan force that captured the buildings of Zambrano Row in hand-to-hand fighting. Cos ordered his cavalry to threaten the Texan camp, but they found it well defended.

General Cos concentrated his troops at the Alamo, but four companies of his cavalry rode away rather than continue the struggle. On December 9, Cos asked for surrender terms and Burleson accepted the surrender of most Mexican equipment and weapons. The Texans allowed Cos and his men to retire southward because neither army had supplies to sustain a large group of prisoners.

Texas casualties numbered thirty to thirty-five, while Mexican losses, primarily in the Morelos Infantry Battalion, which had the primary job of defending San Antonio, totaled about 150. The difference in the

number of casualties is attributed to the greater accuracy of the Texans' rifles. ***Most of the Texas volunteers*** went home after the battle, but Texas troops remained in town, which, with Cos's withdrawal, left San Antonio and all of Texas under the Texans' control. During this time a Texas provisional government was appointed and one of the results of that government was something called the Matamoros Expedition. The expedition proved to be an unmitigated disaster. In my next episode I'll talk more about this expedition, about the Texans army, and what the politicians were up to while all this was taking place.

So until then, if you want more information on Texas History, visit the Texas State Historical Association. I also have two audiobooks on the Hidden History of Texas one which deals with the 1500s to about 1820, and the other one 1820s to 1830s. You can find the books pretty much wherever you download or listen to audiobooks. Links to all the stores are on my website <https://arctx.org>. So until next time, please tell your friends about the program, I'd appreciate it.

See y'all later, peace